

# *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies*

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ERRS

## Introduction

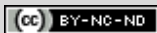
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Guest Editor

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## Introduction

It is my pleasure to present to you the sixth issue of *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* (ERRS). Based on the general notion of “Figures of Otherness,” this issue of ERRS contains seven texts concerned with one of these figures: the feminine.

Strictly speaking, Ricoeur never addressed the theme of the feminine – in contrast, for example, with Emmanuel Levinas. It is true that one can find some references to this theme or to women, but with no proper development or conceptual deepening. There are nonetheless some good reasons for exploring the notion of the “feminine” in Ricoeur’s thought. For a start, there are at least three main topics in his philosophy that intersect with the concerns of feminist thinkers: identity, recognition, and otherness (or foreignness). We also believe it is the whole spirit of Ricoeur’s philosophical project that can be of interest to feminist studies and contribute to their renewal. This conviction comes to be reinforced by the relation of this philosophical to non-philosophical issues, whether it be the multi-disciplinary approach that these projects need or its denaturalization of certain canonical concepts by denying their apparent purity and universality.

We can find in Ricoeur’s work other relevant features to a philosophically-oriented feminism, such as *the conflict of interpretations*. The conflict of interpretations opposes the possibility of human reason to have the last word about any specific issue – a lesson learned from Kant – and calls human reason to be understood through rival hermeneutical perspectives, which itself attests to the fertility of the negative – a lesson learned from Hegel.

The conflict of interpretations, as a philosophical perspective on the limits of rationality and on the epistemic role of alterity, represents a very important finding for feminist studies. On the one hand, it justifies the work of interpretation in their own specific hermeneutic field, while on the other hand, it gives rise to the need for a dialogue opening onto new branches of interpretation, especially with regard to anthropological issues.

To read Ricoeur from a feminist perspective is thus to remain true to his thought, and in so doing, to contribute to the development of a philosophical project as well as to do justice to humanity as a whole. The seven essays collected here demonstrate this in different ways.

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The seven essays can be divided into two distinct groups. The first group includes three texts dedicated to more general reflections on Ricoeur’s work and on his possible relation to questions concerning women and the feminine.

Under the title: “The Need for an Alternative Narrative to the History of Ideas or to Pay a Debt to Women: A Feminist Approach to Ricoeur’s Thought,” Fernanda Henriques’ essay aims to show that Ricoeur’s philosophy – especially his conception of memory and history, on the one hand, and of the human ability to take initiative, on the other – requires us to recount the philosophical tradition differently, by granting women a renewed sense of dignity and thus by constructing a more accurate representation of ourselves.

In “The Subject of Critique: Ricoeur in Dialogue with Feminist Philosophers,” Annemie Halsema accomplishes a twofold task in establishing that: 1) there is more proximity than distance between the Ricoeurian and feminist conceptions of the self; 2) some of Ricoeur’s

theoretical positions can provided added strength and coherence to some findings of feminist thinkers. This is what Halsema highlights when discussing the dialectic established between sedimentation and innovation, or between ideology and utopia.

In the final text of this first group, titled “L’autre féminine: de la passivité à l’action au travers de l’opposition,” Carlos Comparán seeks to understand the notion of the “feminine other,” that is, the feminine as the other. His aim is to “distinguish [the feminine] from both the concepts of man and woman.” He achieves this by distancing himself from the stories of iconic women: Penelope, Antigone, and Medea. What he really wants to stress, though, is the conceptual “self-other” or “identity-alterity” relation, understood as a relation of recognition – a kind of recognition that sets free those who are implicated in it. Comparán’s text begins with some theoretical positions defended by Ricoeur and then proceeds to a dialogue with Greek thinking, thus showing an opposition between the kind of world displayed in an epic and the one presented in tragedy. This study of tragedy is very original, particularly with the difference between the action of Antigone, which ends in failure, and the action of Medea. Based on the Ricoeurian conception of the living metaphor the “seeing as” of metaphor and Kant’s transcendental schematism, Comparán show Medea to be the true figure of action – because she sets the other free and allows him to start his life afresh. In this sense, Medea is a revolutionary figure and not only a rebel.

The texts composing the second half of this volume put Ricoeur’s thought into dialogue with feminist authors. The first of these, titled ““First” and “Third” World Feminism(s): Does Paul Ricoeur’s Philosophy Offer a Way to Bridge the Gap?” is by Stephanie Riley, who presents Ricoeur’s thought from the perspective of *Living Up To Death*. She underscores the originality of that book in two respects: it is acutely aware of the vulnerability of life and thought, and it stresses the importance of the body in its proximity with other bodies. The aim of this article is to show an overlap with the concerns of feminists like Trinh T. Minh-ha or Grace Cho – whose reflections are concerned with the links between bodies and texts, especially when bodies carry the traces of traumas or when they are foreign or excluded. The close relationship one between Ricoeur’s and Trinh T. Minh-ha’s thought is also interesting insofar as it allows one to bridge, by means of texts and films, two distinct semiotic fields.

The next article, “Explorations in Otherness: Paul Ricoeur and Luce Irigaray,” by Morny Joy, explores two philosophical courses – one of a man, one of a woman – which seek to think otherness as such. This text shows that, even if their starting points are rather different, their end points meet and thus allow for a fruitful dialogue between them. This is not a direct dialogue, but a shared will to work for justice and equity. Ricoeur trusts in the power of metaphor to enlarge our understanding of reality and to bring something new and meaningful come into the world. That is not the case of Irigaray, but her doubt is directed toward the Lacanian conception of metaphor, that is, of metaphor understood as *substitution*. Ricoeur, however, is opposed to this conception as well and thus the Ricoeurian perspective can actually strengthen Irigaray’s conception of metaphor.

Under the title “Être fidèle à soi: Féminisme, éthique et justice à la lumière de la philosophie de Paul Ricoeur,” Damien Tissot aims to show “how Ricoeur’s work provides us with interesting resources for articulating a dual demand of feminist discourses: a demand for justice and for true recognition.” He thus enters into dialogue with Judith Butler, Emmanuel Levinas, and Annie Léchenet. First, he articulates the need for recognition in terms of “self-esteem” and “loyalty to oneself.” This reasoning is grounded on a thesis by Annie Léchenet, who proposes a notion of recognition that is distinct from Hegel’s notion of a “struggle.” Then, this essay presents both

Ricoeur's and Butler's respective notions of "recognition" and puts them in a dialogue with Levinas. The text as a whole shows that Ricoeurian ethics offers useful conceptual tools for feminist research, such as justice and self-esteem. The notions of promise and self-esteem, together, can provide a model of recognition that corresponds with the idea of loyalty to oneself – which can be conceived as implicit in feminism.

In the last text of this issue, "Ricoeur et Butler: Lumières sur le débat sexe/genre, à travers le prisme de l'identité narrative," Marjolaine Deschênes shows the fragility of Butler's conception of the relation between sex and gender. The author shows that the philosophical sources of inspiration for Butler's position – the genealogy of Nietzsche and Foucault and Derridian deconstruction – do not allow her to overcome certain dualisms and thus prevent her from achieving her goal. Things turn out differently, according to Deschênes, for the Ricoeurian notions of three-fold *mimesis* and narrative identity. They avoid dichotomies and hierarchies, and one thereby acquires a more useful understanding of identity.

To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have been involved in preparing this issue. First and foremost, my deepest gratitude goes to Johann Michel and Scott Davidson, who worked on this volume with me, as well as Jérôme Porée who helped with the revision of this introduction. I would like also to thank all the members of the Editorial Committee who helped with the selection and revisions of the articles.

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